

Ruth Asawa: San Francisco's Artist



Millions of tourists have seen Ruth Asawa's art pieces in San Francisco. There is the fountain in front of the Hyatt on Union Square, the flowers on the Buchanan Street Mall in Japantown, the fountain at Ghirardelli Square and the wire sculptures in the deYoung Museum.

Over the years we have photographed her pieces on our trips to San Francisco.

Larry Stevens

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The San Francisco fountain at the Hyatt on Union Square.























HYATT
UNION SQUARE

RUTH ASAWA'S SAN FRANCISCO FOUNTAIN

Visitors come from far and near to see the fountain that tells the visual story of San Francisco, created by world-renowned San Francisco artist Ruth Asawa.

Commissioned by Hyatt in 1970 and completed in 1972, the fountain consists of 41 individual bronzed plaques, each about 26 x 32 inches, depicting San Francisco landmarks, covering the entire circular wall of the fountain bowl and measuring over 14 feet in diameter. At the center of the high wall of the drum you will notice an "HH", which represents the Grand Hyatt on Union Square. Everything south of Union Square is to the left, everything north is to the right. The ocean is the top boundary; the bay is at the bottom. You may recognize the Powell St. Cable Car turnabout, the Opera House, Nob Hill, the S.F.-Oakland Bay Bridge, the Ferry Building, Ghirardelli Square, Fisherman's Wharf, the Palace of Fine Arts, and the Golden Gate Bridge, among many other familiar sights. In addition, you may notice fantasies such as Superman flying past the Montgomery Street skyscrapers over Snoopy lying on his dog house or the Wizard of Oz characters. The total effect is of a world both real and unreal which anyone can enter at will.

Because of Ruth's desire to show that what many hands working together could do, help from visitors and over 100 children in the area was solicited. Rather than the traditional sculptor's material, Asawa used a bread dough "baker's clay" to model the fountain. When finished, the pieces of sculpted dough were arranged on the panel's surface and stuck down with white glue. The panels were then set aside to thoroughly dry out before being taken to the foundry for casting.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the fountain is that, in the end, Ruth succeeded in proving her point; it is her work, produced by many hands, and alike all great folk monuments, it belongs to everyone.

The origami sculptures in the Buchanan Street Mall in Japantown.











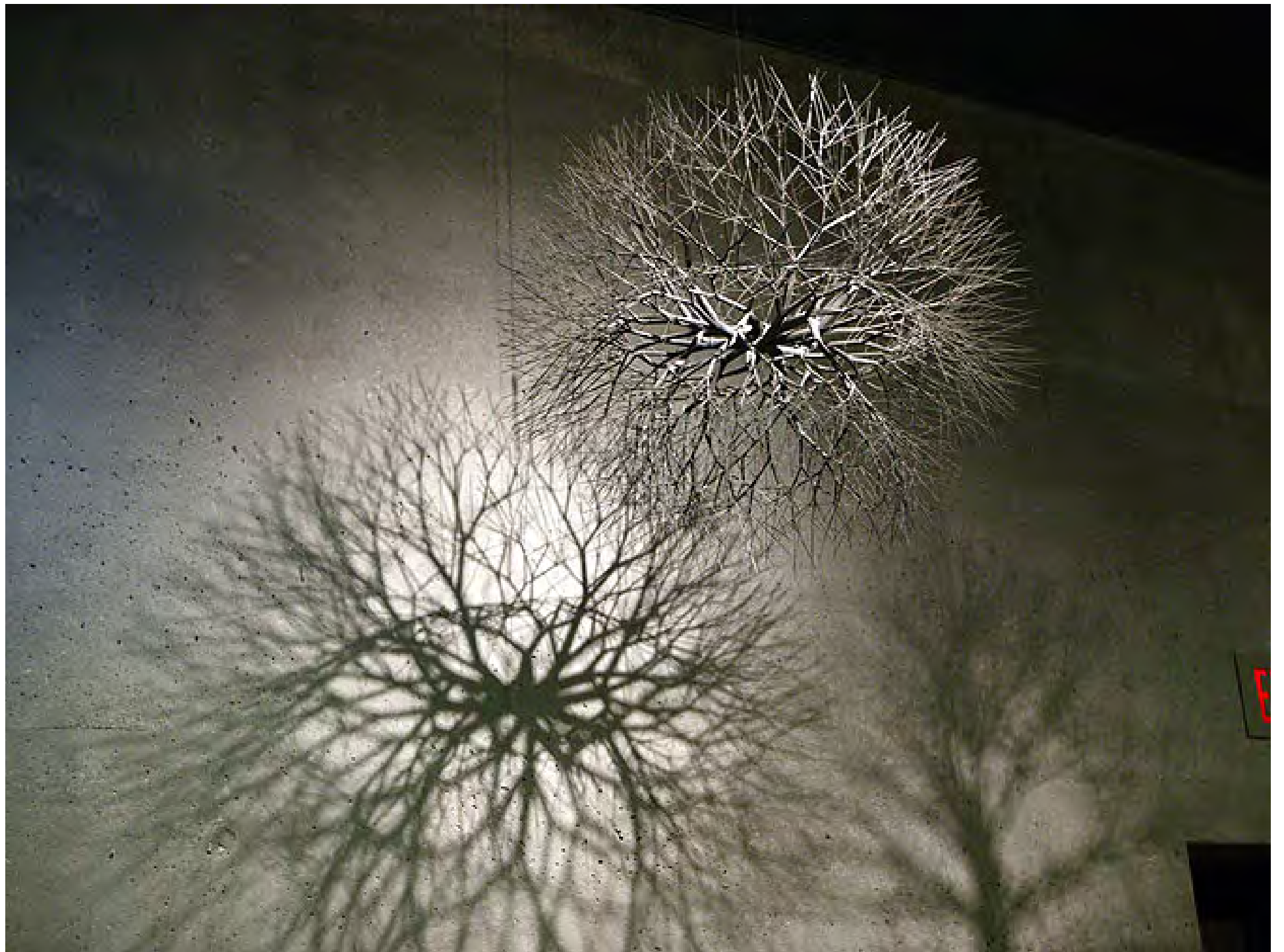
Wire sculptures in the deYoung.













The fountain at Ghirardelli







